

NEW PUBLICATIONS.

RANKE'S UNIVERSAL HISTORY.

UNIVERSAL HISTORY.—The Great Historical Course of Nations and the Greeks. By LEONARD VON RANKE. Translated by W. PROTHRO, Fellow and Tutor of King's College, Cambridge. Two vols. pp. xvi, 494. Harper & Brothers.

The work of the distinguished German historian, of which a portion is here translated, half by the hand of Mr. Prothro and the rest under his supervision, has been carried in the original as far as the end of the sixteenth century of our era. The present volume extends only to the third century B. C., comprising not more than a quarter of the portion already published in German, and we are informed that it will depend on the reception of this instalment by the public whether the translation will be continued." That point, we presume, will not long be left in doubt. The work itself is so important and the translation is so good that English and American readers will not rest satisfied with an experimental fragment. Herr von Ranke's principle of composition is well set forth in a short preface. He does not treat universal history as a collection of independent records of different empires, but as a connected story of the general progress of the human race. It is only upon this broad philosophical plan that a great history would be attempted in our day, and it is only in our day that its achievement, so far as ancient history is concerned, has been made possible. The discovery of buried cities and their monuments, the progress of archaeological interpretation and the scientific study of philology, have thrown a flood of light upon the remote past, carried back the era at which genuine history can be said to begin, illustrated the significance of many celebrated events, and obliged us to revise many time-honored opinions. Herr von Ranke, making thorough use of all the results of modern investigation, aims to show the rise and development of great nations, the political contests which have affected their career, their material and social advances, the growth and influence especially of their religious ideas, and their action and reaction upon one another in the history of humanity at large. His scheme embraces, therefore, a difficult combination of the particular and the general, and the most remarkable characteristic of his work is the success with which this has been accomplished. In explaining why he has undertaken a history on such a large and exacting plan, he says: "My point of view throughout has been the following: in the course of ages the human race has won for itself a sort of heirloom in the material and social advance which it has made, but still more in its religious development. One portion of this heritage, the most precious jewel of the whole, consists of those immortal works of genius in poetry and literature, in science and art, which, while modified by the local conditions under which they were produced, yet represent what is common to all mankind. With this possession are inseparably combined the memories of events, of ancient institutions, and of great men who have passed away. One generation hands on this tradition to another, and it may from time to time revised and recalled to the minds of men. This is the thought which gives me courage and confidence to undertake the task." In these sentences we have not only an expression of the inspiration of his work, but an indication of some of its most striking features.

Leaving the question of the origin of society and culture as one with which it is not the function of history to deal, he begins with the first country of which we have any documentary record—namely, Egypt—and presents an admirable survey of the intimate connection between the Egyptian religion and the Egyptian state. The worship of Amun and the other divinities of the Nile was early in conflict with the local worship which had spread westward from the Valley of the Pharaohs; and the primitive record of the worship of Jehovah—the cosmogony of Genesis—was an express countercurrent opposed to the conceptions of Egypt and of Babylon. Almost at the dawn of history we see that have three great forms of religious worship appearing side by side—the local religion of the Egyptians, practically a brutal polytheism, and the intellectual godhead of Jehovah. Herr von Ranke makes an impressive statement of the radical and enormous contrast between the religion of the Hebrews, as it appeared thus complete, consistent and aggressive, and the idolatries with which it was immediately in conflict; and without directly arguing for divine revelation, he leaves no doubt of his profound conviction that the absolute idea of the pure godhead expressed on Sinai could not have been evolved from any religious conceptions then existing:

"With the Egyptians and Babylonians everything individualized the infinite powers of the sun, the earth, the earth itself, Jehovah, on the other hand, appears as the creator of heaven and earth, as both the originator and the orderer of the world. It would almost seem that the idea of a divine being in man, in a more refined version, a divine flood, was not completely excluded; but this conception itself rested on the idea of a previous creation. The creation of man is the point in which all differs. With the Egyptian man is not distinguished in kind from the sun from which he derived his life, nor from the earth from which he sprang. The same is true of the Babylonian cosmogony, where the divine element in man is only revealed through the God of a flood to fall down to earth. All creatures are genetically the same with man. In the Hebrew cosmogony, on the other hand, the elements plant and animal are called into being by a supreme intelligent Will, which creates in the last place man after His own image. The divergence is immeasurable. God appears prominently as Being independent of the created world; He appears to the eye in man, but not in the fire. Speech is bestowed upon man, who gives each created thing its name. In this his pre-eminence consists; for he alone, as Locke has remarked, possesses an innate faculty of framing an abstract idea of the world, and of creating something beyond the individual. While the descent of some from the sun and others from the stars establishes a difference between man and man, creation by the breath of God makes all men equal. Under the Godhead as independent of the created world the dignity thus implanted in man appears; it might almost be said, as a principle of creation."

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